

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

edited by
JOHN HESTER

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EDITORIAL

In a letter published elsewhere in this issue of *Christian Drama* a correspondent asks whether there cannot be more criticism in these pages non-Christian as well as of Christian plays. This plea would seem to be a real need. There is no organ as well placed to give Christian opinion on the contemporary theatre as this magazine. In other countries the opinion of the Church is sought and respected in the world of the theatre as elsewhere, and that opinion can be seen at work influencing the drama on which it comments. Here in England the influence also exists and many from all branches of the theatre world have testified to it and hoped for its extension. It is felt therefore that in future *Christian Drama* should as a matter of routine discuss recent productions in the commercial theatre which have something to say about religion either friendly or unfriendly. This in effect will mean a rather larger proportion of space being devoted to the West End than has been so in the past. The opinions expressed will necessarily be those of individuals and should not therefore be read as having the authority of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain. And as distinctly personal opinions it is hoped that they will frequently promote discussion among readers, whose Christian traditions will often differ in detail from those of the critics. The discussion might profitably be carried over into the pages of *Christian Drama*, which always welcomes readers' correspondence.

Any survey of the past year on the London stage would surely give pride of place to the work of the English Stage Company directed by Mr. George Devine at the Royal Court Theatre. In addition to passages from the works of Mr. John Osborne, whom one suspects may one day have many things to say about religion, two of the plays have dealt entirely with that subject. Both are controversial and are described elsewhere in these pages. Both stimulated debate and gave a mixture of gratification and offence to churchpeople. But the outstanding fact is that there they are, plays concerned with religion (though one of them clearly not a religious play) occupying the most influential stage in London. This fact is a challenge to all who believe in the potentiality of drama as a force for the extension of God's kingdom. This magazine can be a powerful argument at the disposal of that potential force.

Contributors to this issue of *Christian Drama* include:

Nicolás González Ruiz: dramatic critic of *Ja*, which has the second largest circulation among Madrid daily newspapers. He is editor of *Teatroológico Español*, and is noted for the purity of his Spanish style. His translation of *The Lady's Not for Burning*, authorised by Christopher Marlowe, is shortly to be produced at the Recoletos Theatre in Madrid.

Wyn Griffith : author and broadcaster on Welsh affairs. He is Vice Chairman of the Arts Council and Chairman of the National Book League.

Frank Shelley : actor, producer and playwright, he is a former Director of the Oxford Playhouse. He appeared as God the Father in the recent production of the York Mystery Cycle.

THEOLOGICAL DRAMA FROM THE SPANISH POINT OF VIEW

by NICOLÁS GONZÁLEZ RUIZ

In Spanish literature the theological drama has a special significance, the form of which is prescribed by our dramatic theatre of the Golden Age. In Spanish theological drama one must distinguish between two aspects: that of theological drama properly so called, and that of the "auto sacramental," a short allegorical piece written to proclaim the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and, in a few cases, to defend the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, long before the Catholic Church proclaimed it as a dogma.

In our most important theological drama the problem of predestination and free will predominates. The most significant of these works is *condenado por desconfiado* by Tirso de Molina. Another problem is the redemption of the soul, not only at the last moment of life but also by a special grace of God returning to life moments after death to confess. This is treated by Calderón in *La devoción de la cruz*. There are many plays on the lives of the saints or on biblical themes; but I do not think they should be called theological drama. What I want to point out is that our great theological dramatic art is a product of the struggle against the Protestant Reformation and therefore deals chiefly with what Catholicism affirms and Protestantism denies. Therefore as the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Conception of Mary without original sin are what fundamentally distinguish Catholics from Protestants, there exists an entire cycle of Spanish plays written by the greatest authors (Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina, José Valdivielso, etc.) devoted exclusively to the exaltation of those dogmas.

It is important to account for the transcendence of this historical phenomenon. Theological drama is conceived in Spain, not only at a time referred to but always, as metaphysical and essential and not existential. (I do not say "existentialist" for I am not referring to a concrete philosophical doctrine, but to a trend which fits in perfectly with Catholicism.) This ensures that our public always understands theological theatre from an essentialist point of view far removed from the real concept of drama and coming nearer to symbolic representation.

ven in those cases of the great theological dramas quoted, the human characters are created especially by the author as an example and also come symbols of something.

The Spanish theological drama which has most influenced the entire world is doubtless *El burlador de Sevilla* by Tirso de Molina, in which there takes shape for the first time in the theatre the figure of Don Juan, the deceiver of women. To us Spaniards, Don Juan is none but the sinner who relies on having many years left to him for repentance and so allows himself to be overtaken by death and goes straight to the flames of hell. He is an unrepentant sinner who has not confessed and repented in time. The sin which is attributed to him is most grave in the Spanish understanding of life. In Spain lust has a special category among the seven deadly sins. I am not now trying to say whether we are right or not, but only to explain some phenomena peculiar to our theological plays.

In the figure of Don Juan are blended two old stories earlier than Tirso de Molina's play. On the one hand there is the story of the seducer of women, cynical and lying, who considers legitimate all the false promises by which he attains his ends. Don Juan not only seduces, he also deceives. In his foreign incarnations he becomes an unbeliever, almost an atheist, as happens in Molière; but he is not so. He is a believer. He makes only the grave mistake of not realising that God determines how long he will live. His punishment is to die without being given time to confess and repent.

United with this story, supplying the occasion for the death of Don Juan, there was another tale which presented a young libertine who on turning from an orgy passed through the outskirts of a cemetery and invited a dead man to supper. The dead man kept the appointment. The play means that it is Don Juan himself who invites one of his own victims to his table. And that act of sacrilege puts him in contact with the world beyond and carries him off to the infernal abyss when he thought he still had a long time left before death.

In the romantic age the eternal destiny of Don Juan undergoes a modification which to a great extent reveals our psychology. The drama of the 19th Century poet José Zorrilla, *Don Juan Tenorio*, had its first performance more than a century ago and is still performed every year. Zorrilla radically altered the Spanish conception of Don Juan and supposed that a woman's love, who died young and enamoured of the libertine, obtained from God the favour that she should await from her grave the moment of his death, to try to save him. And Don Juan was saved by her, for this woman succeeded in getting Don Juan to confess to God at the last moment of his life, and repent of his sins. I have always said that this rise of Don Juan to heaven fulfils the aspirations of the psychology of the Spaniard, who has tendencies like those of Don Juan. He feels an intense fear of hell. If Don Juan is saved, a vital hope unfolds. All. In this I believe lies the popularity of Zorrilla's play.

I think I have said enough in this short examination to show what is

our concept of theological drama, a concept which is essential, metaphysical, contrasting with the existential tendencies of the modern theatre. The modern theatre is not concerned with symbols but with men: and so, whilst it is in the theological and religious order generally although it cannot be called theological in the strict sense, it is concerned with the stated problem not between symbolic figures but in the present moment of life. When it chooses a biblical passage as its subject, it is important above all to penetrate to the human substance which lay beneath the saintliness or sinfulness. The view is focused upon the problem of Judas or the denials of Peter in an existential way, trying to understand the men before the one became a traitor and the other a saint, to give an account of their struggle as men before arriving at treachery or sanctification.

In our essential theatre we are used to Peter's appearing on the stage with venerable white beard, an immaculate white robe and everything which indicates him as the Head of the Apostolic College. But the existential drama wants to see the rude fisherman with his black, bristly beard, struggling and wavering, a prey to fear to the point of denying Christ thrice before the cock crowed twice. If Judas is being dealt with we like to see the traitor giving himself away from the first moment with a grim look or sinister gesture. But this does not satisfy the existential which tries to investigate in dramatic form, by understanding a man upon a stage, what were the motives which could bring him to his lamentable and infamous action.

In the same way in modern drama we are usually surprised by the presence of problems put forward by Graham Greene, or Fabrice, generally by the great writers of contemporary Catholic drama. Spain which in the 16th and 17th centuries made a splendid contribution to theological drama, greater than any other country, can be said not to exist in the theological drama of the 20th century. Investigation or interpretation of the complex causes of this would be out of place here, where we must limit ourselves to pointing out one of them, namely our metaphysical and essentialist tendency. Doubtless there is something more than this. Of the foreign authors mentioned *The Living Room* by Green and *The Trial of Jesus* by Fabrice have reached us perfectly performed in the most famous theatres in Madrid.

The reaction of the public and critics has been confused. Before they were accepted it was found necessary to affirm with the authority of the theologians that there was no reprehensible doctrine in these works: they were then accepted without great conviction by the people, who do not want to see presented on the stage that agonised struggle of the soul. They prefer, within the religious though not purely theological order, to see some moral problem put into execution and unfolded which at once points out the conflict between customs or social vices and the conscience of a Catholic who wants to remain loyal to his faith: or choose the method of the melodramatic serial story to show an event transcending to the supernatural, such as the offer of a son's life, accepted by God to obtain the salvation of his father's soul.

I have tried, without taking any side, to report objectively to the readers of *Christian Drama* with regard to the Spanish theological theatre and its historical and psychological relationship with our way of thinking and of looking at life. Much space would have been needed to go deeply into the subject; but I think at any rate the reflections expressed will be clear and of some interest.

Translated by Rebecca Moseley.

THE YORK CYCLE OF MYSTERY PLAYS

WYN GRIFFITH

writes as a member of the audience.

A grey summer evening of low cloud and threatening rain as I crossed the bridge and joined the stream of people walking into the Gardens towards the ruins of St. Mary's Abbey to see the York Mystery Plays. I knew that I was going to see something of quality, something old that belonged to York, but as I had never seen any religious plays anywhere, my expectations were ill-defined. And I must confess to a certain sense of unease, attributable no doubt to the relics within me of that early Welsh nonconformist and sternly puritan upbringing that no subsequent education can entirely quell. The pulpit, the big pew, and a vision of the bearded faces that would not even allow a pipe organ in the chapel sixty years ago: they stood between me and the very thought of play-acting even in secular matters. How then could I respond to religious drama? I sat down, one of many hundreds, opposite the grey walls of the Abbey ruins and looked at the bare simplicity of the setting, the broken walls and the green sward, and turned my mind back along the centuries and tried to picture the Abbey in the days of its glory. I could not do so, and I decided to let the spoken word and the movements of men and women carry me back to the mediæval world, if they could. I was not deluged. The distance in time seemed to be too great. Too much had happened. And there remained the question whether this was to be merely an historical excursion or a demonstration of timelessness. The event would show, of course, but I was doubtful. And even, I must admit, somewhat apprehensive. Can a mystery be revealed? What degree of knowledge brings hindrance rather than access? I remembered Keats: "Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude light from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge." Ought not the greatest Mystery in the world to remain in the half-light of the mind rather than in the speculations of men? But I remembered the Mass, and that the eye can also be a window into the soul.

All this was, of course, an un-simple but not un-humble approach which proved to be a most memorable spiritual experience. A few minutes later I was caught up in the unfolding of the story. The pattern of movement, beauty of colour and the play of light were all so essentially right that they receded into the background, unobtrusive because they were means to an end, and I know of no greater tribute to pay to the æsthetic skill that contrived all this. The voices rose and fell naturally, the cadence made convincing, the archaic diction here and there carried into contemporary life by a Yorkshire accent that merely emphasised York's ownership of the plays. Here was a story of no time, of our time, of all time, made living by the genius of an unknown author and interpreted for us by a company of men and women who made no attempt to magnify themselves in the telling. This was devotion in action, made natural by skill and sincerity.

I came away in a state of elevation, anxious only that everybody should share in this great experience. For this, apart from all questions of religion—if indeed it can be so separated—is something of universal stature as a work of art. The York Mystery Plays are bright jewels of our heritage, and our pride in them should compel us to safeguard their continuance. As I walked back through the streets of York I remembered my doubts and apprehensions and found them merely wisps of ignorance of no importance whatsoever. Light had come out of the darkness of that summer night. And a little later, as I came to myself, I realised that it had been raining most of the evening. But neither I nor the hundreds of others who listened and watched in silence had found this of any importance. Greater matters had unfolded themselves before us, and we had become part of them.

FRANK SHELLEY

writes on acting in the plays.

What impressed me immediately on my arrival in York for rehearsals was a sense that everyone connected with the production was a-top with immense enthusiasm and concentration, working toward the theatre dress rehearsals and the opening performance. One was quickly caught up in something infinitely worth-while, something more important than one's own contribution—though that too had, obviously, its own inescapable value. In fact, one was caught up in that very happy and surprisingly rare experience—the experience of community.

When we achieve this feeling of real community we seem less important to ourselves, though thereby we may become more important to other people. In a production such as this of "The Mystery Plays" it is obviously impossible for any actor, however vain, to consider his own personal prestige. Each and every performer, from Brian Spink who played Christ down to any of the anonymous huddled figures in the enormous tableau of the Crucifixion, was striving for the show's importance—not his own.

I was often asked, and am still asked, whether I was not in some sense

embarrassed, or alarmed, to attempt the role of God The Father. I can only say that with the producer's help and with the stimulus of others acting with me, I forgot what might appear to be the fundamental impossibility of my task. I tried to leave the text to do its own work, to let the wonderful old words (made just that much more apprehensible by Canon Purvis) speak out with their own simplicity and dignity. A fellow actor confessed to me that he had had misgivings about the advisability of personifying the Creator in a drama, but that he was completely won over by Martin Browne's treatment, in which the figure of God was no more blasphemous than a similar figure in a stained glass window.

I also found the introduction of medieval church music a most inspiring and sustaining background, especially in moments like the Walk to Jerusalem, or the Ascension, where all taking part felt that we became dramatic symbols of the devotional chant.

Some thought it remarkable that professionals and amateurs should have got along together so well. But, in view of our subject matter, I should have thought it much more remarkable if there had been any serious element of discord between us. In any case, what could we mere handful of professionals have done, in a production of this size, without the wonderful loyalty, hard work, and previous Festival experience of York's own local amateurs who came determined to do justice once again to York's own plays? The amateurs worked as amateurs should—*con amore* . . . from the young angels played by young girls still at school to the oldest member of our cast, Oswald Gregson, a happy and youthful eighty-seven, who by the way was the only one of us who had had the distinction of performing to the Queen and the Duke when they came to York. Rain prevented our performance, but the Queen asked Oswald just to repeat his two lines for her, and the Duke applauded him.

Yes, for those few memorable weeks we were all members of a very varied, very strange, very happy, and I think very worth-while Family.

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

LONDON THEATRE

by JOHN HESTER



[Photograph by David Sims]

Martin Miller, George Devine and Joan Plowright in Act II of **The Making of Moo** by Nigel Dennis, at the Royal Court Theatre.

How Can We Save Father? a play in one long act by Oliver Marlowe and Wilkinson, was first produced by Mr. Peter Wood for the English Stage Company at this year's Devon Festival, and introduced London at the Royal Court Theatre on August 5th. It is a parable in modern dress, an experimental religious play which is at times pure farce and which borrows freely with tongue in cheek from the styles of both Mr. Eliot and Mr. Fry. The opening minutes, enacted in dumb show, gives us the spectacle of a country clergyman whose parish borders upon a great atomic research station, who is now in the process of attempting suicide. This comes to no successful conclusion, the poor man ends by hanging grotesquely head downwards and is discovered by his wife. Upon release, he performs antics and utters sounds which suggest madness, and at a conference of his wife and five grown-up children wonders what is

be done, for a visit is shortly expected from the new bishop of the diocese. Mother hands the task of saving father over to the children and gives them an hour in which to effect the cure. This is indeed accomplished, but only with the aid of the boy friend to one of the daughters (I was not

John Phillips in the opening moments of *How Can We Save Father?* by Oliver Marlow Wilkinson.



Photograph by Mallett of
reiter.

certain which one): he is a practising psychiatrist, and decides that the best hope of a cure is for himself to become madder than the madman: this he proceeds to do, appearing as a quaint caricature of a bishop, uncertain even of the century in which he is living. The final coup for the recovery of the priest's sanity is achieved by the slashing of his dog collar from around his throat: the priest is no longer an isolated figurehead of

official church, but is once more a man among men—and better fitted therefore for the essential work of a priest.

The heart of the parable is contained in the play's last few minutes before that there have been long spells of talking, much of which seemed to be only indirectly relevant to the main theme. The five children each represent one of the chief professions to which people look for an improvement and a purpose in life—one is a doctor, one a budding sociologist, one an artist, one a soldier, and one is married to an economist. They and the worlds they represent have for too long been content to pass responsibility in the last resort to "the Church," never realising that in fact they themselves are the Church just as much as the parish priest who is their father. After his escape from the chains of this artificial and unreal responsibility which has succeeded in dividing the Church from both life and the people who live it, father passes the responsibility back to his children: they must perform their own functions and he will perform his: they will be on their own feet and he will be there to help them as he must.

I gather that the play gave great offence to many faithful people who first produced at Barnstaple, and this one must regret though perhaps expect, since its form is so startling. It is certainly not in the conventional tradition of religious drama. There are passages which would turn a screen in even the dullest Christian conscience, as when the pseudo-bishop is appalled at the quality of the sacramental wine given him when he asks for a drink, when compared with the superior vintage kept for the priest's private consumption: how often do we churchpeople do that—give our umpteenth-best to God and keep the best of ourselves for ourselves! even the retention of such a detail as this from the whole play would make it a justifiable medium for the extension of God's kingdom. But it is sad to say that on the whole the play is not clearly written—indeed it seems more like a family charade in its untidiness: and the splendid meaning of the parable is not well brought out in the closing minutes, which are broken into by a most intrusive facetiousness. Yet the fact remains that here is a religious play staged commercially by the most enterprising and respected company to play in London for many years, and for this one must again be profoundly grateful. The quality of the play was perhaps shown in the worst light by contrast with the other play with which it was presented in London as a double bill—**The Chairs** by Mr. Eugene Ionesco which is a masterpiece by a writer of genius. But both Mr. Wilkinsons and Mr. Devine are to be congratulated on its achievement of a place in the corpus of Royal Court productions.

* * * *

Christians who saw Mr. Nigel Dennis' **The Making of Moo**, first produced by the English Stage Society at the Royal Court Theatre on July 25th, 1957, had also reacted in sharply contrasting ways to what the author calls "A history of religion in three acts." Set in the drawing-room of a house in an unspecified colony, the principal characters of the play are

an English Civil Engineer, with Elizabeth his wife, Donald his secretary, and William the native butler. The play opens with murder, for during the building of a newly completed dam the local river god has been inundated by his own waters and as a result the populace have abandoned all restraint and decency. Due to return in one week to England, the three English embark instead—at first somewhat frivolously—upon a project to restore law and the rule of peaceful fear. They will make a new god whose name will be Moo (a cow having approached offstage as they searched for a suitable name!). In conference the three work out the principal attributes of Moo, finding this a larger proposition than they had suspected. At first the engineer thinks that only the “Code of Moo” is important; his wife insists on a more personal angle and undertakes to write his biography, his bible; while the secretary, a musician of sorts, offers to compose a collection of hymns and psalms which will surely add to Moo’s emotional appeal. The native butler is chosen to be the first high priest of Moo, though he has confessed that he himself has hardly missed the recently deceased deity, and his new vocation fills him with considerable alarm.

The Second Act shows what has become of this quartet (and Moo) after two years. The drawing-room is transformed into a temple. The engineer and his wife have not returned home but have remained to become the leaders of a successful new religion. Vested in great splendour with symbols of their autocratic power they lead the cult of Moo, whose sacred badge is one all-seeing eye. Two lawyers, sceptics freshly arrived from England, are constrained to “stay to vespers,” which consists of the sacrifice of themselves with dramatic incantation, their blood to be drunk later at the altar.

Act Three is set many, many years later. The faith of Moo has settled into a state of sentimental respectability. Where once only sacrificial blood was accepted from English visitors, compliments and donations in sterling are now received. The originators of Moo are alive still, gentle, foolish and doting. The myth which they created has been accepted: the Revelations of Moo which Elizabeth wrote are ascribed by scholars to genuine antiquity, for deduction has led to the belief that Moo was worshipped even in ancient Carthage! Only Walter, son of Moo’s originators, now stands out for the violence of the old religion. He has come through suffering to believe in the power of Moo to transform lives, for him pain is still the greatest of teachers and religion is a knife turned daily in one’s side. He is in fact a figure derived directly from the extremities of the Protestant and Counter Reformations.

It must be said that such a play as this is not for everyone. Many will be repelled through its action upon their convictions and their temperaments. It treats with irreverence, though rarely with malicious offence, of things which many hold distantly or intimately sacred, and by a brilliant cascade of wit and satire it scorns and debunks all the elements of men-made religions. Fortunately or unfortunately here the debunking stops. The play has after all nothing to say about the essence of our Christian

Faith, for it assumes throughout that religion must necessarily be made, that it only flourishes with barbaric cruelty and after a total surrender of the intellect, and that it comes inevitably to a state of maudlin decline. This may indeed be the case with whatever in religion is made by men, yet the Christian who sees the play should be confident in the certainty of his knowledge of Him who is. He knows simply that God—God—a personality infinitely beyond the author's conception of Him—as the nothingness beyond the range of telescopes. The Christian knows that Jesus was truly the Son of God, not the "Nothing-made-flesh" whom Mr. Dennis would appear to imagine. And so we might go on and on. The play flies so wide of the mark as a criticism of Christianity that many Christians who are temperamentally and intellectually fitted will be able to sit back securely and enjoy the romp upon the stage, which often contains a joke at their own expense. We have all met the flamboyant character in the play who claims that he is so busy that he cannot go to church and so has to be generous instead. We all know those who believe with the engineer that their God is no more than a "way of life, a code," or with the secretary for whom religion is all bosoms (Abraham's, etc.) and music. But perhaps the most important thing about this play is that Mr. Nig Dennis should have troubled to write it at all. Even as the mischievous man-centred thing which he supposes it to be, religion is a subject which actively concerns him and moves him to write with such sparkling style. He is not indifferent to its claims, and therein surely his blasphemy is less than that of our average citizen. What a play Mr. Dennis may one day write if he comes to realise that living faith is a reality and that the fact of the Incarnation, the Bible and the Sacraments are indeed objective truth. If this play is ever written, it could not be better produced than its predecessor by Mr. Tony Richardson, better designed than by Miss Audrey Cruddas, nor acted than by Miss Joan Plowright, Mr. George Devine, Mr. John Osborne and Mr. John Moffatt.

SUMMER SCHOOL, KEELE, 1957

"You do a lot more work than the Coal Board we had last week," said an attendant. Whatever that meant, the Summer School did arouse hard thinking. The theme was the production of **The Terrible Joy**, a passion play especially written for the school by Mr. John Crockett to explore the possibilities of modern religious drama. Scenes were written for the various groups of students to illustrate the aspect of drama they were studying, and a united production on the last night brought the school to unity.

From the beginning, tutors showed themselves alive to the problems of religious drama that tries to present up-to-date themes in terms acceptable to the modern world, especially to those outside church traditions. We discussed where religious drama was leading, and modern aspects of music, production, and play-writing. One group explored the challenging possibilities of plays acted in the street.

In all this, long accepted ideas were constantly challenged, but the most controversial subject was Mr. Crockett's play. This showed the trial and crucifixion of Our Lord in modern England under occupation, Christ the victim of a Gestapo-like police force, and mob brutality not unknown in England to-day. We saw reactions of watchers in the public park, office girls, and some choice subjects for the Wolfenden Report.

This sincere attempt to express Calvary in modern times deeply shocked many at the school. They felt its savage expression of hate and brutality embarrassing to act, and totally unsuited for production outside the school. One of the staff said it degraded religion. Yet the historic crucifixion, too, was degrading and brutal, and we had to consider whether such religious drama is not escaping modern facts in outworn convention and sentimentality. I believe much of it is. I wish, however, **The Terrible Joy**, had shown rather Christ crucified by the little and less spectacular sins of the suburb and housing estate, which many of our audiences know better than open brutality. I also felt the brutality, though it needed showing, was allowed to unbalance the whole as a Christian play. Christ, victor even in His suffering, was too much only the cause for a riot of lust and hate, and we were left with the wrong total experience. Nevertheless, from this play came much of the school's inspiration, and it left us with a deeper understanding both of drama and of the Passion.

The most powerful experience of the school was, in all its activities, a unity of devotion and an enjoyment incessant rain could not damp. The groups, classes and chapel sermons brought out the need for drama to use both the mind and the body, and the most moving moment of the whole school was perhaps a portrayal of Christ's trial before the Sanhedrin, acted in physical movement only. With the Church too prone to ignore the body and the world outside materialistic, we saw how drama can bring both spirit and body together to express fully Christian faith to-day.

LOUIS JAMES.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Readers will recall the correspondence in the last number of Christian Drama on the subject of a review in the Spring issue. The reviewer "A.C." was the Revd. Arthur Chandler, Vicar of Ilfracombe.

THE EDITOR,
Christian Drama.

Dear Sir,

Father Nicholas Graham is right to point out that if the thought behind Ronald Duncan's play **A Man named Judas** is that Judas Iscariot was right, then the play can hardly be called a Christian one.

I could wish that Fr. Graham had read or seen the play. But I should do an injustice to Mr. Duncan if I did not admit that in my review of the play, I was so intent on interpreting the mind of the Judas of the play that I saddled Mr. Duncan with a thought that was, I am sure, not in his mind. I ought to have written what I meant to convey, namely that Judas *thought* he was right.

Mr. Duncan gives in Judas the picture of a sincere and consistent man, not just a traitor who sold his Master for money. Judas thought he was right; not right for himself, but morally right. He was consistent, but expected a much too concrete result of his action. He committed suicide before he could justify himself.

But Fr. Graham's letter raises another and very important point. Are we only to have reviews of plays that are orthodox? and more: what about the plays now being staged that are a deliberate attack on the idea of God, especially the Christian conception of God?

Ought not your journal to help many puzzled Christians by giving critiques of such plays from a Christian point of view?

If the mistake I made in reviewing Mr. Duncan's play—certainly a Christian play—will make more people show an interest in a fine piece of work I shall have done something worth while.

Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR CHANDLER.

TWO PLAYS IN THE NORTH

Candle in the Heavens by *James Kirkup*.

We have at least three reasons for being grateful to His Grace the Archbishop of York for his enlightened action in commissioning Mr. James Kirkup to write a play on the life of St. Hilda for Hull's Company of the Way to perform at St. Mary Lowgate, quite apart from the initial reason that it is nice to know something about St. Hilda, our rather neglected Whitby Abbess.

In the first place, and this, I think, is the most important, the commission has given Mr. Kirkup an opportunity to write and to see performed his second play written for performance in a church. And naturally because it *is* his second play it is a great deal better than his first, the Peterborough pageant. Has, I wonder, T. S. Eliot ever been asked to follow **Murder in the Cathedral** with a second play for church production?

Secondly, **Candle in the Heavens** adds one more to the bare half-dozen plays which can be produced in front of an altar. Exactly what the qualifications for such a play are I am not quite sure, but the absence of theatricality — the, in other surroundings, excellent persuasion-by-theatrical-device—is certainly one. Mr. Kirkup writing as a poet writes also with a sort of businesslike matter of factness and this strange combination produces what must be another qualification—dignity. He is never, perhaps he does not know how to be, dramatic: he steals up to his finale by a different road, but by the end of the evening we have lived through an experience.

And thirdly the archbishop's commission has given the young Company of the Way a play of its own; a new work to be studied, analysed and built into production from the beginning, which is just what this company now how to do. At the moment it has the kind of weaknesses that can only be overcome with time, but already it is mature in its procedure: it has commissioned a poet to write a play on its chosen local theme: it has commissioned a young musician to write music for the play and given him the means to have it performed: it has employed a sensitive costume designer whose designs are properly interpreted: a set designer whose set-pieces are well designed and well enough executed to stand right against the church's carved screen: it has a cast which has committed itself completely to the play and is audible. Finally it has the Vicar as producer, who, both vigorous and fastidious, saw that all these ingredients were necessary and got them together.

The play's theme is to show the divine resolution, of perpetual and inevitable human squabbling over detail, by the few whose inner peace can accept both human detail and eternal truth. It suggests that in a world infested with quarrels one at least of those few is always at hand. Here St. Hilda is their representative. She faces, and absorbs into herself, the quarrels of the Church over the calendar and the tonsure, of the king

with his son over disobedience, and with his wife over leanings towards Rome, of her nuns over the make-up worn by the ladies of the court and the flashy habits worn by the nuns from Italy, of the courtiers over the rustic conditions of local hospitality, and she returns sometimes by compliance and sometimes reproof the solution that comes only from wisdom learnt through humility. This is universal: the play is located in Whitby by the use of a chorus of townswomen, perpetually straining their eyes over the cliffs towards the boats manned by their men. Their words of despair, hope, joy, apprehension flow into and out of the plot of the play like the rising and ebbing tides. They are basic humanity, on a level below the quarrellers, but no less helpless. They turn to, and turn away from the Candle in the Heavens with a perpetual flow and ebb.

Like the company, the play has curable weaknesses. The chorus would often be better split into smaller speaking groups and individual voices; so much unison become lumpish however delicate the writing: the character of the novice who lives through an inner crisis that lasts the length of the play is not really convincing: often the appearance and disappearance of the actors is jerky and arbitrary. As for the company, both the individuals and the production in general lack rhythm—the basic weakness of almost all amateur and many professional productions. What is thought by the mind and spoken by the mouth is not expressed in the body. This is probably the reason why the choruses are not yet as well spoken as they should be. A single pulse does not beat through the whole production. When the cast and the producer have learnt to use bodies as well as heads and throats this company will have reached the final stage of achievement. But it is a hard lesson to learn; it needs professional help and untiring study.

STELLA MARY PEARCE.

* * * *

T'Other Shift by K. M. Baxter, as performed in the Manchester Diocese by Theological Students of Durham University, under the direction of Miss Pamela Keily.

"We don't have many shows in our canteen." This was the most frequent excuse or modest explanation given by the manager or the personnel officer at most of the works where we hoped to take this industrial play. Five firms were, however, willing to welcome the play and the players, and the tour was on. A steel works is the play's natural setting, not in the canteen but in amongst the machinery where the overalled players seem to be one with the workers of the audience. It was to an iron foundry that the play came in Manchester and where it was most readily understood and appreciated. To play amidst furnaces and big castings was far easier for the young players than on a canteen stage to an audience still digesting dinner. Nevertheless in a cotton mill, in an electrical engineering firm, and in the largest cardboard box manufacturing firm in Europe the play found its way into the hearts and conditions of the audience.

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It was some ordeal for the students, directed by Miss Keily. Here was no group of New Pilgrims and yet much of the duties and hardship of that professional company fell upon these players. They came down after a term of examinations and summer festivities to live as well as play in Lancashire. They lodged with willing hostesses in different parishes. They entered into the worship and life of the parish church. They spent the late evenings getting to know the family among whom they were staying. Early each morning they set out to find yet another works where the play was to be given. To Miss Keily goes the greatest share of praise for keeping the very high standard of performance; to the students we are indebted for their dedicated efforts and high spirits which enabled them both to see the importance of the play and at the same time enjoy every minute of it.

But why Manchester? This diocese is not renowned for its work in industry. The recent formation of a Northern Provincial Drama Committee has encouraged us to take note of the scope of religious drama in other dioceses. We, like Sheffield, are industrial and we must speak to industry as they have done through their Industrial Mission whence this play originated. As a first venture it was highly successful, although we had little proof from the press to show this. One famous northern, or should I say, national paper was invited to one show, took a number of photographs and then made no mention of it within their pages. It was a first step too from the industrial point of view. Who had ever heard of giving a play on the works floor? This was too startling a precedent in most cases. Of over fifty firms who were approached only five could see their way to welcome it. Their welcome was overpowering at times! The lunch provided for the players told of their generous hospitality. Not only the salmon and the chicken and other dishes but the care and tact with which they were served. A bottle of beer for each male member of the cast, a bottle of coca-cola for the ladies and for the visiting clergy. This was the first time an amateur group had toured this play into the uncharted regions of industry. The effects were startling! "Let me have more of this," commented one representative, "for this is the first time the church has given us any real help." Both management and workers agreed that the play in twenty minutes told accurately of conditions and difficulties in industry. This was a real beginning, a great encouragement to all who are interested in communicating the Gospel to the whole world.

D. A. CLEGG.

1958 HOLIDAY COURSE
ST. LUKE'S COLLEGE, EXETER
11th to 20th AUGUST, 1958

For our twelfth residential nine-day course we are returning to St. Luke's, Exeter, where we had such a successful course a few years ago.

Our intention is to give as comprehensive a training as possible in the art of play-writing and presentation from the Christian point of view under the title:

"FROM PLAYWRIGHT'S IDEA TO CURTAIN UP."

While one group is tackling play-writing, others will learn about the preparation of the script for production, the art of production and acting, stage management and lighting, and finally they will present a play or an excerpt from a play. One group will study "Post-war drama and the Christian Faith." Daily sessions in movement and speech work will be arranged for all.

Daily services will be held, conducted by the Chaplains who will be present throughout.

We hope that our readers will make this course known and encourage many to come, especially young men and women who are leaders or potential leaders in the churches, social organisations or drama societies. It matters not whether they are beginners or have much experience: all can learn a great deal under the direction of the team of tutors.

St. Luke's as a Church of England Training College is the oldest foundation of its kind in the country. Though only half a mile from the City centre it has a large estate with playing fields and gardens and has greatly improved its buildings since the war, the newest addition being a fully equipped theatre. It has a fine chapel. Residence in the College and five hostels nearby consists mostly of single study-bedrooms.

The cathedral city of Exeter is an ideal holiday centre, providing many attractions within this historic city, as well as endless opportunities for excursions into the heart of Devon. The programme allows time for holiday recreation and excursions will be arranged.

Leaflets giving particulars will be available from the R.D.S. of Gloucester office before Christmas.

CARINA ROBINSON

REPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN DRAMA COUNCIL OF CANADA

by MARION M. BRILLINGER, its Director.

A midget beside a giant! That is the way the Christian Drama Council of Canada feels beside the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain—in point of time—as we place our three years of existence against the twenty-eight years of the latter. From the point of view of miles, however, spanned by new memberships, we wonder if our midget has been wearing seven-league boots!

Our members in Newfoundland are four thousand miles away from their fellow-Canadian members on Vancouver Island (twice as far as from Great Britain) but a common interest unites them: that of mediating the truths of God to our generation through the uniquely powerful medium of drama.

On the occasion of our Drama Council's third birthday, a special bulletin was prepared, and greetings were received from a number of its founders, patrons, and officers. The first chairman, Rev. Leland Albright, indicated something of the uphill struggle which has proved rich in reward: "The Christian Drama Council of Canada has crowded many vicissitudes into its short career of three years. A venture of faith, it derived from the vision and courageous enthusiasm of Isabel Squires Clark—it was financed on the proverbial shoe-string. In spite of this, the Council has enjoyed a goodly share of humour, romance and good fellowship. Above all, it has discovered a hitherto unmet need, and is meeting that need in increasing measure."

One of our patrons, the Right Rev. J. S. Thomson, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, said: "The Christian Drama Council of Canada is establishing an ancient connection between the Church and Drama, which had become lost." Dr. Thomson elaborated on this truth at the service of dedication which opened the new Shakespearean Festival Theatre in Stratford, Canada. To him it was significant that the centre was opened with a religious service, and he said: "The drama has come home to its ancient mother, which is the spirit of religion, but not in the tattered rags of a returning prodigal—rather as a princess in her own right who bears both wealth and wisdom from the far countries of her traveling. Too long there has been an estrangement between the theatre and the church, between the arts and religion, between the creative works of the imagination and the spirit of worship."

The permanent Festival Theatre, replacing the tent, indicates in a tangible and exciting way the primary work of the Shakespearean venture at Stratford—the presentation of plays each season in a centralised locale, with a specialised cast. What is the locale of the Christian Drama Council? Where else than in the hundreds and thousands of churches—large and small—across the land, where small groups of drama-minded Christians seek to present the truths of the faith and turn to the Drama

Council for help in making their presentations as effectively and skilfully as possible. To this end, the services of the Council have been used to the full: the lending library, lists of recommended plays, lectures and courses, technical assistance, help with productions, workshops of a day, a weekend, or a week. Summer Workshops have been held in Central and Eastern Canada in past seasons, and this year one in Western Canada has been introduced.

Occasionally the Christian Drama Council chooses another channel for furthering its objects: the actual production of a play from its recommended list. **Christ in the Concrete City** was presented at our annual meeting last year, and it has since been produced almost twenty times in different locations. Directed by Blanch Hogg, it has won very favourable comment from the drama critic of the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, Herbert Whittaker, who said: "This week we went to one of the churches of the city to see some of the work of the Christian Drama Council. We were much impressed . . .

"Mr. Turner's story tells, in broken episodes, the story of the Passion. The trial, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection are told through fresh eyes—with the actors playing many roles, commenting with many voices on the events that are happening before their eyes. The play is a skilful one, avoiding impersonation of Christ, but giving certain lines to the narrator, finding new glimpses of the familiar, breaking into modern terms that implicate us directly. The six players shift from role to role, subtly minimising the theatrical and playing with quiet, forcible conviction.

"In bringing her players to this peak of simplicity and strength, Blanch Hogg, former director of London, Ontario, has done a splendid job. Her grouping of the players for each scene never smacks of the pageant, but brings the various episodes into sharpness. There were moments of sheer mime that were a revelation.

"With such work as this being done under its banner, the Christian Drama Council of Canada is moving in small ways but effectively. If the Drama can be brought back to the Church, this is the way to do it, we are convinced."

It is our hope that the youthful Christian Drama Council may continue to grow "in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Now Ready

Plays for Christmas and Epiphany

A new, up-to-date Edition of this Play-List is now on sale.

Price : 1/6 (1/- to R.D.S. members).

2d. postage.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

NEW PLAYS

the Chester Mystery Plays. ed. Maurice Hussey. (Heinemann, 7/6.) HX.
5 parts. Large mixed cast and crowd.

A new version of the Chester Plays, modernised from the original text as published by the Early English Text Society, with as little alteration as possible, but with some condensation and omissions.

It is well printed in the Drama Library series for easy reading. Notes on staging are included. (Fee: apply publishers.)

the Exodus (the Hosiers' Play). ed. J. S. Purvis. (York Festival Society, 1/-)
H., or street. 15m. 1 act (about 15 mins.).

The text of the play given on a cart in the streets of York, during this year's festival; taken from the mediæval York Plays. It tells of Moses' contest with Pharaoh, and the crossing of the Red Sea, with childlike enthusiasm. (Fee: apply York Festival Society.)

Five Plays for Christmas. Daphne Johnson. (Oxford University Press, 3/6.) XH.
Three of this useful group of plays are short, simple mimes, designed for church performance following Evensong or other services. The fourth is a carol play, also for church, and the fifth, **Christmas at the Goat and Compasses**, is a scene for hall performance.

The plays were written by boys of a Nautical School and their producer. They can be recommended for schools and for general use with mixed casts. (Fees: apply publishers.)

Four Modern Verse Plays. ed. with an introduction by E. Martin Browne. (Penguin Books, 3/6.)

The first of a new series of plays in Penguin editions; containing: **The Family Reunion** (T. S. Eliot); **A Phoenix Too Frequent** (Christopher Fry); **Thomas Cranmer** (Canterbury) (Charles Williams); **Happy as Larry** (Donagh MacDonagh).

Street Drama Aids. (Independent Press.)

New titles in this series include: **The Friendly One** (E. M. Duckett), 1/-; **Ruth** (J. Stafford), 1/6. (No fees.)

the Lost Missionary Box and Saved by a Soapbox. A. A. Baker. (Typescript.)
Both: H. 1 act. 6 characters.

Two entertaining missionary plays for children, telling the further adventures of the characters in Mr. Baker's **What a Collection!** (No fees.)

More Scenes from the Old Testament. Margaret Steppat. (S.C.M. Press, 4/-.)
Seven plays for mixed casts of children, intended mainly for use in schools.

the Mustard Seed. A. Simmons. (Epworth Press, 2/6.) H. 5 acts. Large cast (doubling possible.) (A Methodist pageant.) (Fee: 2/6.)

the of the Twelve. Barbara Willard. (S. French, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 2m., 3w. (Fee: £1/1/-.)

Our Own People. O. M. Rookwood. (S.P.G., 6d.) H. 1 scene (30 mins.) 4b., 3g.
A short missionary play for young people, about the visit of an Australian boy to an English family. (No fee.)

Religious Drama 1: Five Plays. ed. with an introduction by Marvin Halverson. ("Living Age Books," Meridian Books, New York, \$1.45.) Containing:

For the Time Being, a Christmas Oratorio, by W. H. Auden. Originally set to music by Michael Tippett, and not intended as a play, this has been performed as drama.

The Firstborn, by Christopher Fry.

David, by D. H. Lawrence.

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

The Zeal of Thy House, by Dorothy L. Sayers.

The Bloody Tenet, by James Schevill. A new American play about Roger Williams martyred in 17th-century Massachusetts by "the bloody tenet of persecution for the cause of conscience." It offers a new approach to Williams' personal conflicts, and the issues involved.

The first of a series to be published in the U.S.A. This volume represents a drama "more explicitly religious in theme" and also "the return of poetry to the theatre."

(NOTE.—A copy of this volume, not obtainable in Great Britain, has been given to the library by Mr. Robert Seaver.)

The Stable Manger. Jessie Powell. (R.D.S./S.P.C.K., 2/6.) XH. Continuous action. Speaking Chorus, inc. 5m., 3w., choir.

A Nativity play in a simple stylised form, similar in technique to **The Way of the Cross** and **Holy Family**, linking the Nativity with contemporary problems and attitudes of mind. It is adaptable to church or hall, and gives latitude to an imaginative producer.

Well known in typescript, the new printed edition of **The Stable Manger** has been revised after experiments in producing the play.

We can recommend it to groups looking for a Christmas play with modern relevance. (Fee: 10/-, 7/6.)

The Story of Pok Sun. Ivy Russell. (S.P.G., 6d.) H. 2 scenes. 5b., 5g., children.

A Korean girl hears the story of the Good Samaritan, and acts on it. (No fees.)

Touch of Faith. Freda Baker. (Epworth Press, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 6 women.

A neatly written and constructed play for women, with a domestic setting based on the Gospel story of the woman who touched the hem of Christ's robe. (Fee: 2/6.)

Triptych. The Earl of Bessborough. (Heinemann, 25/-.)

Three historical plays, including **Like Stars Appearing**, the life of St. Richard of Chichester; fully reviewed in *Christian Drama*, Autumn, 1953.

The other plays are **The Noon is Night** (the history of Simon de Montfort) and **Darker the Sky** (King Edward I). (Fees: apply publishers.)

Upon a Rock. Ronald Falconer. (St. Andrew's Press, 1/6 per vol.)

A series of six lively discussion-playlets, written on behalf of the Church of Scotland's "Tell Scotland" campaign, broadcast on the Scottish Home Service, 1954. In each play, a contemporary problem is reviewed as it affects a young Presbyterian minister and his congregation.

1. **Or Upon the Sand?** 2. **Begin on Your Knees**. 3. **Only too True**. 4. **For Better or for Worse**. 5. **Who is My Neighbour?** 6. **Jobs for the Boys**.

Recommended for reading. (No fees.)

The Well of the Star. H. M. Richards. (Typescript.) H. 1 act. 4m., 3w., attendants (opt.)

A simple Epiphany play for young people. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

The Word. Marion Jay. (Oxford University Press Music Dept., 3/-.) XL. 9 scenes (45 mins.) 12m., 5w., 1b., offstage crowd, choir.

An unusual and beautiful Christmas mime, for churches or halls. The mime is accompanied by narration, in words taken from the Bible and Apocrypha, spoken by a family group dressed after the style of Rembrandt.

The script is adaptable to the needs of different groups of players. Alterations and compressions are suggested by the compiler.

Suitable music is listed, some of it specially composed by Helen Anderson.

Recommended to enterprising groups. (Fee: apply publishers.)

(NOTE.—This play is an extensively revised version of the typescript play, **The House of David**, now withdrawn from circulation.)

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

The York Cycle of Mystery Plays. ed. with a foreword by J. S. Purvis. (S.P.C.K., 25/-.)

The full text of the 48 plays of the York Cycle, as modernised by Dr. Purvis, in a special de luxe edition published to mark the third presentation of the Cycle this summer.

The acting version is still available from S.P.C.K. at 7/6.

(NOTE.—*Permission to perform any part of these versions must be sought from the York Festival Society.*)

REFERENCE LIBRARY

The Age of Chaucer. ed. Boris Ford. (Pelican Books, 5/-.)

This anthology includes essays on **The Towneley Shepherds' Plays**, by John Speirs, and **Morality Tradition and the Interludes**, by L. A. Cormican.

Copyright and Performing Rights. W. J. Leaper. (Stevens and Sons, 25/-.)

For anyone who finds himself confronted with the complexities of the new Copyright Act, 1956, which came into force on the 1st June, last, I would most certainly recommend this comprehensive handbook on the subject.

Written by a Barrister of the Inner Temple, it covers not only the law regarding literary and dramatic works but also such aspects as performing rights in regard to television, films and sound broadcasting.

The whole subject is dealt with in a way which makes it readily understandable by everyone, and for those who need to study any particular aspect in greater detail, there are numerous footnotes giving useful references to the relevant Statutes and Case Law on the subject.

It is a book which in my opinion should be on the bookshelf not only of authors and playwrights but also of anyone concerned in the management of the theatre, either professional or amateur.—J.H.L.T.

The First Stage. A chronicle of the development of English Drama from its beginnings to the 1580's. John Barton. (B.B.C., 2/6.)

The official B.B.C. handbook to the series of mediæval plays broadcast in the Third Programme. November, 1956—September, 1957, providing a helpful summary of background information.

Leap to Life! An experiment in Youth Drama. John Wiles and Alan Garrard. (Chatto and Windus, 15/-.)

An exciting, readable book about Mr. Garrard's work with Secondary Modern scholars in creating their own Dance Dramas, and the remarkable results they have achieved. Illustrated with photographs of the dancers in action.

Highly recommended to all interested in drama for young people.

Music and Drama in New School Halls. (National Council of Social Service, 1/6.)

A very useful leaflet which sets out clearly, and with imagination, the practical needs in presenting drama and music in school halls. It is to be hoped that its recommendations will be followed by those responsible for planning new school halls. They would also be useful for Settlements.—DIANA CARROLL.

Playing Period Plays, part II. Lyn Oxenford. (Garnet Miller, 6/-.)

Part II of this excellent series deals with the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, with special reference to Masques.

Writing a Play. George Taylor. (Herbert Jenkins, 5/-.)

A concise, practical handbook.

NOTES

The performing fee for **Go Down Moses**, by P. J. Lamb, is now one guinea.

A set of costumes for **Tobias and the Angel**, by James Bridie, made for Miss Peiley's production in Sheffield, is available for hire. Please send enquiries care of the R.D.S. office.

Five Plays for Christmas

Daphne Johnson

Here are five ways in which the basic theme of *The Birth of Jesus Christ* (the title of the first play) can be worked out by a producer with a group of unskilled actors. Four of them can be performed in church, the fifth is for a hall with stage and uses a contemporary setting. They are for a mainly male cast but could be used with a mixed group. Production notes on each play are included. *Paper covers, 3s.6d. net.*

THREE PLAYS BY *Vera G. Cumberlege*

Come and Behold Him

A Nativity play, with carols woven into the dialogue and action.

He Came Unto His Own

A Morality play for Christmas and Epiphany.

Crown of Glory

A play for Passiontide.

Each 2s.6d. net, in paper covers.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

— OUR — YEAR 5 PLAN

NEW MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

Notification of this Campaign has already been circulated to all members, but the Council wish to take this opportunity of stressing how vitally important it is that it should be a success, forming as it does part of the Five Year Plan to justify the grant given by the Rockefeller Foundation.

INCREASED MEMBERSHIP MEANS INCREASED INCOME

Since the launching of this appeal in August over **50** new members have joined. This is encouraging but far short of our target for this year.

We appeal to all members to use every endeavour to each introduce **THAT ONE NEW MEMBER** before the close of the year.

FAR AND WIDE

Reports and Reviews of Christian Drama Activities in Great Britain and Overseas

Auckland, New Zealand

Murder in the Cathedral

Professor Musgrove's production of Eliot's play was presented in St. Mary's Cathedral as part of the 1957 Auckland Festival. This remarkable building, constructed entirely of wood, makes an ideal setting for religious drama. Its dark wood is not only impressive in itself, but is perfect acoustically. The slightest whisper is audible, and there is complete absence of echo.

Considering the age of the cast (only two were over 20) the performance was outstanding. The Knights' justification scene was particularly effective, a modern table, four modern chairs and a water-caraf being brought on for the purpose by medieval attendants! It was understandable that these young actors were somewhat less convincing than the four Tempters.

Dominating the play, as he should, was John Thomson's Becket. It may have been difficult to sense the philosopher and politician beneath the present ascetic; but here was a real man and an undoubted cleric. I have seen several Becketts since the first English production, but none who spoke the Christmas Day sermon with such spontaneity and understanding.

The weakness of this production was its handling of the Chorus. The producer took the easy course of dividing most of their lines among single speakers, and so lost opportunities for gathering emotional intensity. And even so they had little individuality of voice and character. Each tended to be the same artificial plaint. If each member of the chorus had been allowed individuality and trained to speak in unison, retaining that individuality within the group, the gain in unity and dramatic power would have been tremendous. In spite of this, however, the production was both moving and effective, and appreciative audiences completely filled the Cathedral for five nights.

Next week the foundation-stone will be laid for the new Cathedral of concrete and brick. It seems a pity that the present building could not be retained for religious drama, perhaps becoming its centre in New Zealand. I have never seen a church so ideally suited to the purpose.—CLIVE SANSOM.

* * *

Gateway Theatre, Edinburgh

The 1957 Holy Week presentation on the Gateway stage was **Spark in Judea**, by R. F. Delderfield, and on Easter Sunday evening, by invitation, the play was performed in the ancient and lovely kirk of St. John's, in Perth.

The Church Touring Group has continued to give performances of **The Death of Adam**, by Terence Tiller, including one in St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, during the 1957 Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama.

The Annual Festival of one-act plays held in the Gateway under the auspices of the Kirk Drama Federation attracted 18 entries and ran for six evenings. Campbell Robson adjudicated.

During October, 1957, "The Crusaders," a composite group from Church Clubs, presented their third production, and chose **The Wax Doll**, a new play on faith healing by the Scots playwright Alexander Reid.

SADIE R. AITKEN.

* * *

Hong Kong

Murder in the Cathedral

It is easy to understand that theatre was born in the church. To my mind, religious drama should never be played anywhere else. I believe that, in England to-day, there is a fashion for performing **Murder in the Cathedral** on the steps of things: let them give it up and get inside, where the play belongs.

Murder in the Cathedral was presented on September 6th and 7th in our own Cathedral and was produced by Timothy Beaumont with such deep

sincerity of feeling that it would be ungracious to draw attention to certain technical weaknesses. Indeed, one had no inclination to stand outside at the end and discuss details of production, as one usually does, with theatrical acquaintances.

St. Thomas à Becket is one of the most forceful characters of history and any play about him, even if it has the advantage of the authorship of a famous modern poet, must stand or fall by the portrayal of the central character.

Becket's first entrance at the main door of the Cathedral proved the sonority of his voice: he matched it with a dignity of bearing that overpowered the historically accurate, but theatrically inadequate, costume he was given. I am sure that St. Thomas wore a simple habit, but, from a theatrical point of view, this particular production would have gained from sacrificing accuracy for more colourful archiepiscopal robes. Peter Preston was most impressive in the first half and reached his zenith in his Christmas sermon. Opinions seem divided about this sermon. To some, apparently, it is just an ordinary duty sermon, though people who think this must admit that it has a twist in its tail: to others, and I am among them, it points with horrid clarity how nearly allied are ordinary life and less ordinary tragedy. After the delivery of certain fairly usual Christmas sentiments, the Archbishop quietly remarks that his cathedral is likely soon to have another martyr—and descends.

This mood was excellently portrayed by Peter Preston, but subsequently his performance declined. He had to work against difficulties for, until then, we the audience had sat comfortably as spectators, listening to the Chorus handing on to us forecasts of doom—and then, suddenly, the cathedral doors were shut and bolted and the audience became part of the play inside that cathedral barred against the knights. It was thrilling, but it meant (to use a hideous modern phrase), a certain amount of re-orientation that was no help to Becket who somehow became a little dwarfed in stature from this point. He was not helped, either, by

his priests, who bundled him to the sanctuary like a sack of potatoes.

If St. Thomas, was, rightly, the strength of the evening, the Chorus was, not so rightly, the weakness. It did its work audibly, but it was too thin on the ground and the volume of voices too weak. If it had to be split into two, half on each side of the acting area, it should have been doubled in number; if that was impossible, it should have been all together on one side or the other. As it was, it did not pick up and intensify and fling back to us the emotions—and is not that what the Chorus is for?

The Tempter Knights I found on the whole very satisfactory as Tempters, but did not consider that they made the most of their self-justification. The scene does not fit very well into the play, but it is superb writing. It should be distributed in leaflet form to all voters before every General Election just to show them what politicians can do.

I have not said and will not say anything about the play as a play. **Murder in the Cathedral** is a work that found its own place in the English Theatre many years ago. To me, it is a deeply impressive and uncomfortably moving exposition in exquisite language not merely of that old conflict between Church and State, but also of the ageless conflict between spirituality and expediency and if, historically, the old argument was not so clear-cut that does not matter.

JANET TOMBLIN.

* * *

Hornchurch, Essex

Have you ever searched the floor for a pin you haven't dropped, washed your hands without water in a basin that wasn't, or walked barefooted over burning sands with your shoes on?

Had you peeped through the Half-door on the evening of Friday September 6th, you would have seen 20 perfectly sane (?) people doing just that. And, that was only a beginning.

What were they up to? They were attending the week-end Drama School run by the Religious Drama Society and held on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon and evening.

Friday evening began when Miss Nicholl, one of the travelling tutors for

CHRISTIAN DRAMA

the Religious Drama Society, was introduced. She soon began putting us through our paces, which at first were hesitant and interspersed with self-conscious giggles, but before long, under her superb guidance, everyone was doing the craziest things in complete earnest. We then read an extract from *Go Down, Moses*, by Philip Lamb. The evening ended with prayers, after which we gathered round for a cuppa."

We could hardly wait for 2.30 on Saturday, to put the play into action. And what fun it was. Everyone threw themselves heart and soul into it. Without scenery, props or any of the usual paraphernalia of acting, with trying to commit "bloody executions" with a script in one hand and a few other little difficulties, we really felt as though we were getting somewhere. (We were aware of it by the end of the evening, when Satan had grown horns, Michael had sprouted wings, Moses was hearing voices and all were trying to get the end out of their hair.)

There is no doubt we all learned a great deal and many thanks are due to Miss Nicholl, who, we are sure, was our inspiration as well as our producer.

During the course, we were privileged to be given two talks by Mr. E. N. Ogben, the National Secretary of R.D.S. To begin, he answered the unasked question "What is Religious Drama?" and said that in his opinion, it was any drama dealing with the relationship between God and Man. He then told us what to look for in a good play and enlarged upon the six main points—theme, plot, crises, action, character, and dialogue. Later in his talk "As the Actor Sees It," we gathered that hard work and practice will accomplish much, that in amateur productions, everything should be the very best possible, as "only the best is good enough for God."

In discussion time on Saturday evening, most of us learned a good deal about R.D.S. itself—if you are a member you can find out how to stick board on, or get expert advice on production. We heard much about the Summer School, too.

The time did not, of course, pass without due attention to the inner man

and we thoroughly appreciated our breaks from hard work to satisfy his needs. Many thanks to all who gave so much time and energy both days to "feeding the brute." No-one seemed to be sitting out at supper time, so we gather no one forgot to bring his tools.

Thanks to our Chairman, Mr. P. Welford, who did an excellent job of keeping us on time throughout, and to Miss Betty Prior, who made the enjoyable week-end possible.

The school closed on Saturday evening with prayers.

J. FELL.

(From the Parish Magazine.)

* * *

Malvern, Worcs.

On April 9th the New World Players, under their producer Mary Dixey, gave an impressive presentation in the Priory Church of *The Way of the Cross* a Passion play by Henri Ghéon.

This performance in the beautiful eleventh century Church, was a moving climax to the series of five performances given in Churches in the Malvern area during Passion week.

The play was presented on the wide steps leading to the Sanctuary so that the setting was that of the High Altar, with the great East window in partial shadow behind it.

The seven members of the cast—two men and five women—were dressed in colours, which ranged from purple through mauve and blue to deep red and light red, and the blending of these colours in the different groupings of each Station was most effective.

The play was presented with true dignity, fine diction, and deep sincerity, so that the offering of this drama, which was in the context of an opening and closing act of worship, made a most inspiring and fitting Passiontide devotion for the actors themselves and for all present.

M.C.D.

* * *

Oxford University Religious Drama Players

For Epiphany 1957, the Religious Drama Players performed a new play by Louis James, a young Oxford graduate. This play, *The Bright Room*, is based on the legend of the Fourth

Wise Man. It is the story of a young Persian, brought up to be heir to the throne, who cuts himself off from his royal background to follow the Star to Bethlehem. He never sees the King, but in the course of his quest he finds freedom to be himself, and in the end learns that in his care for the poor and oppressed, he has been all the time worshipping at the feet of the King whom he seeks.

This is a good play, which introduces and attempts to answer a number of important problems. It is unfortunate that in Oxford neither the production nor, with one exception, the acting, did it justice. It is to be hoped that Mr. James' ability will be better encouraged by further productions of his play.

H.M.W.

(We regret that this review had to be held over earlier this year.)

* * *

Peak District, Derbyshire

The Peak and Bradwell circuit of Methodist churches presented Rodney Bennett's dramatisation of **The Pilgrim's Progress** in Bakewell Town Hall, this September.

It was the first time that a combined effort of this kind had been attempted, and though in a large cast of young people, drawn from a wide area, an uneven standard of attainment was only to be expected, the venture as a whole showed an imaginative grasp of the play which augurs well for the future. The two performances were most appreciatively received.

Bunyan and the Gaoler wore 17th-century costume, but all the other players were in modern dress. The moors of the Peak District are hiking country, and Christian in hiker's dress, with a great pack on his back, was an immediately recognisable figure; and the bright jeans and brighter music of Vanity Fair were also familiar. In this convention Apollon resembled a genuinely 20th-century symbol of evil—our old friend the mad scientist, complete with beard, evening cloak, mask, and diabolical cackle! Because of casting difficulties, Faithful was a girl, and the stouthearted determination and single-mindedness of the typical Mission girl were surprisingly well in keeping with the character.

This treatment and Mr. Bennett's script cause inevitable clashes between modern setting and Jacobean dialogue in places. Mr. Bennett has tried to modify Bunyan's conversational style but not thoroughly enough for fear of losing the flavour of the original, and the result is a curious mixture of the archaic and the contemporary. Mr. Worldly Wiseman, for instance, a city gentleman complete with briefcase remarks, "Beshrew the fellow for his counsel!" At the same time, modern dress compelled the audience to a degree of attention that a pageant of Stuart costume would never have called forth. The evangelical doctrine of Bunyan's allegory stood out, particularly in the early scenes, with a challenging prominence that he would surely have approved, and which fully justified the experiment.

B.J.

* * *

Plymouth, Devon

During the ten days preceding Good Friday this year a production of **The Way of the Cross** by Henri Ghéon, was performed in Churches of various denominations in and around the city of Plymouth by a group called the Fellowship Players.

The Fellowship Players is not just another dramatic society. It was the name given to a group invited by the Plymouth Christian Council from the existing Dramatic Societies in the city to take part in a special production. The Dramatic Societies co-operated in the venture by "lending" their players willingly, and in this way some of the best talent in the city was drawn together. A professional producer was engaged, but both producer and players gave their services anonymously.

The staging consisted of transportable platform sections. These could be used to cover a larger or smaller area depending on the acting space available in each Church. Different levels were used (sometimes with steps from one to another) to give greater movement and to assist in the formation of groups.

Two casts were rehearsed, and in a nineteen performances of the play were given. In only one Church was the play performed twice, so eighteen different congregations saw the play. Perhaps

the most exciting performances were those given in Churches on the housing estates. Large numbers of people not normally found in Church on Sunday came to see the play. The experiment has proved so successful that another production is planned for this winter.

Putney

* * *

On May 7th The Putney Church Dramatic Guild performed **I was in Prison** by Morwenna Bielby in St. Mary's Hall. The play deals with the life of Elizabeth Fry, showing her call to help the Newgate prisoners, and the rival pull of her home duties. The drama of the middle act, in which Elizabeth first wins the trust of the outcasts of society, rather overshadowed the rest of the play which was in a quieter, more expository vein.

The faults of the play, however, did not detract from the success of the players. The passionate dedication of Elizabeth Fry, the quiet humour of her husband, the brisk sympathy of her sister Louisa were all convincingly portrayed, and Stephen Grellet, the French Quaker who guided Elizabeth to her new work, made a short and fiery entry into the play.

The Newgate prisoners were tough and sharply characterised, members of the Putney Over Sixty Club and a number of children helping to crowd the very well-grouped scene. The settings hesitated between the realistic and the formal, but the costumes, which were accurate and imaginative, gave a good feeling of period. Above all the play must be regarded as successful in that it conveyed the immense power of the living, searching Quaker conscience.

* * *

Stroud Religious Drama Festival, 1957

The Festival opened with a service in Stroud Parish Church on 13th October, continued with a week of performances. **The Firstborn** by Christopher Fry, and ended with a Festival Evensong on Sunday night at which members of the company read the lessons and an address was given by Mr. Geoffrey Joyland on "The Impact of Religious Drama."

The Firstborn is a portrayal of human arrogance swamped by a Power and a

Purpose beyond human comprehension. It is not only a struggle between Moses and the Pharaoh, but a struggle between each man and his own pride, and a struggle between men and the inscrutable power of God. This is a difficult and subtle theme to put across. But the Stroud production, under the direction of Maurice Broadbent, did not fail in its attempt to do so. The attentive, tense silence of the audience was a clear indication that the tragic implications of the play had gripped their imagination, and their continuing thoughtful silence as they left the church was a very real tribute to the sincerity and depth of the players' interpretation.

In this play the atmosphere of sultry heat, intangible foreboding and immense, brooding power that surrounds the court of Pharaoh has to be established almost before the action begins, and maintained throughout the growing tension of approaching catastrophe. This was done by simple but effective means. Under the changing moods of Ernest Morris's very skilful lighting a few hangings and gauzes and a carefully thought out interplay of brilliance and drabness in costume design took on the jewel brilliance of ancient Egypt flaunting its splendour in the hard brightness of noonday, the hopeless, grey misery of the down-trodden Israelites, and the terror of plague and darkness that swept upon the land of Egypt, leaving only a ruin of broken shadows. To this was added a queerly imaginative performance upon the organ by Samuel Underwood of some sombre and ominous background music with accompanying timpani and sound effects, which did much to increase the sense of throbbing, breaking power too great for man to bear.

In his players the producer was fortunate. They followed his lead steadily through mounting excitement and terror to a climax of tragic intensity. Seti's stony immobility, permitting neither anger nor grief to overrule the age-long dignity of the Pharaohs, was a natural foil for the fierce entreaties, swift anger and sudden gentleness of Moses. Ramases, abrim with eagerness for life and careless gaiety on his first entrance, grew into

thoughtfulness, perplexity and distress as he grew into manhood. Teusret played to his increasing responsibility with childish grace, and the lyrical moment of calm during her song had a delicate pathos not a little enhanced by the blend of glowing colour with wreaths of lotus flowers. It made the sudden interruption of Moses with the dead Israelite boy in his arms seem all the more violent. Anath, gentle with Teusret and Ramases as she was bitterly accusing with Seti and with Moses, expressed with irony and pity the painful stress of conflicting loyalties and long-suppressed emotion, and the helplessness of one who can see the people she cares for destroying themselves before her eyes. Her reticent playing in the brief moments of feeling between her and Moses was particularly effective. Miriam, too, understood the use of reticence. Her weary strength and the drooping but unbreakable patience of her tired shoulders spoke clearly of the long years of suffering endured by all her people. Shendi grovelled and strutted by turns, reaching a terrible moment of abject terror before his final despairing cry as he rushed out to his destruction. Even Aaron, patiently trying to keep things on a practical level and to steady the wild fires of Moses with a backing of common sense, could not shut out that last lost cry of Shendi. His uncertain, blundering turn away to deal with other things was eloquent of the bewilderment and unwilling pity that he felt.

Nor could Moses shut out the last, poignant words of Teusret as she knelt beside the dead Ramases when tragedy finally overtook the Pharaohs. This is the most difficult and the most important moment of the play, for Moses has to change before our eyes. From a man whose pride and confidence lie broken with Ramases and whose grief and pity for the tragic sequence of events he has evoked are mixed with bewilderment and remorse at his own blindness, he has to become all in a moment a leader great enough and strong enough to turn his back on Egypt and lead his people out of captivity. As we saw this new Moses come into being and stride out to the

waiting Israelites, we were left with the sad, unanswered question of Fry's play: Why must Ramases die to set free the Hebrews? Why must the innocent suffer? The answer came in the final lighting which linked the dead figure of Ramases on the stage and the sound of the Children of Israel chanting their way to freedom with the whole long history of Christianity leading up to the perfect example of death for the sake of others—the Figure on the Cross.

More than 2,000 people saw this production of *The Firstborn*. It was a presentation which stirred both heart and mind to the realisation that in our indifference to the sufferings of our fellow men we yet reflect the arrogance of the Pharaoh, and in our own blind demands for help from a Power we do not understand we are no humbler than Moses. If all of us were caught up in this sincere and moving production—as indeed we were—then the work of the Stroud Religious Drama Festival has not been in vain.

* * *

Sussex Branch, East Blatchington.

Christ in the Concrete City

Those involved in the production of the Passion Play this year had some misgivings as to how it would be received. It was thought that some people might be shocked by the rather crude juxtaposition of the passionate scenes with snippets of dialogue about jive and television and the Vicar's visit.

To judge by letters received and comments made, there was no need to worry. Stanley Merry, who took part in the first performance of *The Way of the Cross*, wrote to say that he found it intensely gripping and almost unbearably moving in parts. Others have said almost the same thing.

A visitor from the Bishop's Advisory Committee for Religious Drama commented upon the life and vigour of the spoken word, and the economy of action, which added point to the stark reality. She appreciated the sensitivity of the presentation and the skill with which the cast manipulated their quick change of mood and dress. She saw the play as a challenge to those inside as well as those outside the Church. (From the Parish Magazine.) D.E.

RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

An inter-denominational body working in association with S.P.C.K.

166 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE
LONDON
W.C.2

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 1957

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

1957



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 11 a.m., on Saturday, 2nd November, 1957, at Friends' House, Euston Road, N.W.1.

Mrs. K. M. Baxter was in the chair. The meeting opened with prayers led by the Rev. R. Duce of Petts Wood.

Mrs. Baxter welcomed members to the meeting and expressed her pleasure at the good gathering. She conveyed to the meeting greetings from the President (the Bishop of Chichester) who was unable to be present, and read a cablegram of good wishes from Mr. and Mrs. Martin Browne in New York.

1. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, held on 30th November, 1956, were confirmed.

2. Apologies were received from the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Chichester, Mr. and Mrs. E. Martin Browne, Miss B. D. Bangay, Rev. F. V. Boyse, Dame Dorothy Brock, Miss M. Bly, Mrs. G. T. Browett, Miss E. Browett, H. Rowntree Clifford, Esq., Miss E. M. Everett, Miss Mary Forbes, Father J. Hester, Rev. Canon G. Hewitt, Rev. Dr. Alan Kay, Miss P. Keily, Miss Frances Mackenzie, Tom Nabeta, Esq., Rev. J. F. Parkinson, Miss B. Prideaux, Rev. R. Spivey, Miss M. Stanley Wrench.

3. Chairman's Report: The Chairman welcomed members and expressed pleasure at the large attendance. Membership had increased by 116 this year as compared with 55 last year. She paid tribute to the memory of Lt.-Col. Grant, explained the establishment of a Summer School Bursary in his memory, and expressed the Society's gratitude over the legacy of £50 left by Col. Grant, the sum being added to the Bursary Fund, which now stood at £100.

She reported that in January, 1957, she and the Hon. Treasurer had an audience with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had, as a result, brought to the notice of his Bishops at their Summer meeting a memorandum prepared by the Society's officers setting forth the needs of the Society and the services it offers. She expressed the hope that support of a similar sort might come from the Free Churches, so that financial help at present predominantly from Anglican sources might be more truly inter-denominational.

She reported the Society's first jumble sale which realised £22 4s.0d., and thanked the principal organisers, Mr. Ronald Ayres of Spurgeon's College and the Rev. A. E. Cordell of Old St. Pancras. This was financial help on a small scale. She had also to report help on a much larger scale in the five-year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the fruit of long negotiation and full investigation. The sum of £10,350 spread over five years was given to extend the work of the Society and to relieve the overburdened officers and staff. Welcome though it was, it would only be of real value if it resulted in greatly increased home support.

To this end the Council had already appointed a new member of staff Mr. A. L. Brookes, as Public Relations and Appeals Officer, and after being disappointed over the appointment of a second Assistant Travelling Adviser, were once again in pursuit of a likely person. The S.C.M. of Cambridge University had applied to the Religious Drama Society for a producer for their Christmas play and the Society had been able to secure for them the services of Mr. Graham Suter and an assistant. It was hoped, as soon as the new member of staff was appointed, to be able to do more of this sort of thing, and in particular to establish a semi-professional group in central London to give try-outs and public performances, thus supplementing the kind of work done by groups such as Miss Nicholl's Southwark group.

The Chairman expressed the interest and gratitude of the 58 members who had benefited by the Rev. M. Merchant's study scheme, and told the meeting Mr. Merchant was at that time in Washington pursuing his Shakespearian studies.

The Handbook Committee had had several meetings and their work was only delayed by the writers who have little time to write their promised chapters. Misses K. Bainbridge Bell and J. Ottaway had prepared a brief history of the Society which would soon be appearing in pamphlet form.

The Society was again under a very deep debt of gratitude to those Honorary Advisers who made the Society's needs the first call upon their private time and energy.

Turning to the Summer School at Keele the Chairman said that was in new country for us. Her impressions, even though they were clouded by the weather and by some sort of pre-Asian 'flu were first and foremost of the wonderful newness of these Schools as they come round. It was interesting to see the reactions of two or three important visitors who expressed themselves astonished that drama should need so much preparation and that religion could be so much fun. The crown of the year's work by the officers of the Society was shown at these schools in the relationship established between members of different denominations, different social backgrounds, and different educational backgrounds.

The International work now remained to be mentioned. Mr. and Mrs. Martin Browne's cable had revealed why they were not present. They were in America on a month's work sponsored by the Presbyterian Church, which is interested in exploring the possibility of Religious Drama in the mission field. In 1960 there was planned an International Conference, for which money from the Rockefeller Grant had been allocated. The organisation of this would fall chiefly upon the Travelling Adviser's shoulders.

The Chairman expressed pleasure at having been able to welcome Dr. Robert Seaver to the Summer School. He was responsible for the drama course included in the training programme at Union Theological Seminary, New York. He came to Keele after visiting Europe much impressed by Miss Joan Ford's work in her winter travels on the Continent. It was as a result of what Dr. Seaver saw at the Summer School that Miss Robins had been invited to the U.S.A. to assist Union Theological Seminary in the running of their first Summer School. Miss Robins will be going in July, 1958, as also will Miss Pamela Keily.

As the Society's delegate the Chairman had served on the Northern Committee which meets in Leeds and which is responsible for Miss Pamela Keily's work. Miss Keily was at the moment starting the production of Philip Turner's new play. She preserved a lively interest in all the work of the Society.

The Chairman concluded, "I am myself going to Union Theological Seminary for the Spring Semester from February to the middle of May. I have been invited to lecture on 20th Century Drama and its relationship to Religious Drama. Thus I shall be much occupied with the Society's interests on that side of the Atlantic. I hope that I shall not be entirely absent from your thoughts and prayers."

Travelling Adviser's Report: Campaign: Miss Robins reported that both she and Miss Nicholl had carried on with the campaign for members, Miss Nicholl's area being Greater London whereas she had been mainly in the South-west. Their joint report revealed the enormous amount of work that had been done. Miss Robins said it was an uphill task and there had been some disappointments. For instance, nothing much had been done in Devon, and they had hoped for a week-end course at Torbay but the idea had to be abandoned. In Gloucestershire little had happened except in the Cinderford area, where they had had a useful week-end school and hoped to form a branch. The County Drama authorities had planned a residential week-end

course at which Miss Robins was to tutor, but this had been cancelled owing to insufficient entries. There was nothing to report from Somerset but there had been some increase in membership in all these Counties.

The Provinces: Miss Robins said it becomes ever more obvious that there is an urgent need for the Society's staff to get out into the provinces. Religious Drama is happening everywhere and often without knowing anything about the existence of the Society. It is here that the Rockefeller help comes in for Mr. Brookes is now available and it is hoped there will soon be another Travelling Adviser. As the staff grows, so the knowledge of the Society is spread and requests for guidance and training increase.

Training: A list of short courses is given in the report and it is hoped many more courses will be held in the New Year. They depend upon (a) staff assisted by a panel of tutors, (b) local organisation. When the latter is good it results in a really large and lively course, festival, or other activity. Such people are hard to find, however, clergy are overworked, and so disappointments come with badly-attended courses or even cancellations. Everything possible will continue to be done from headquarters but the Society inevitably depends upon local people for publicity and organisation in their area.

Productions are listed. Requests for these are growing and usually depend upon plays that have been seen.

Summer Course: The nine-day course at University College, Keele, Staffs, last August had 148 students and was generally greatly appreciated. One of the tutors wrote a modern Passion Play as an exercise, with special scenes for Youth group, street scenes, stage scenes, and a crowd scene using the entire school. This proved a valuable experiment. There was also a study group and a design group.

In 1958 the course will be held at St. Luke's College, Exeter, from 11th to 20th August, the theme being "From Playwright's Idea to Curtain Up."

Overseas: Miss Robins stated she was planning to visit Europe in the New Year to prepare for the 1960 Conference and Festival which it was hoped would take place in Switzerland. She also stated she had been invited with Miss Pamela Keily to visit the Union Theological Seminary, New York, for July and August next summer as a tutor in a three-week programme in the Arts and Religion. This was to be followed by a Convention of Episcopal Young Churchmen in Oberlin, Ohio. The Council had agreed to Miss Robins accepting the invitation though it meant she would not be present at the Summer School at Exeter.

The following summary of work by the Travelling Advisers was then given to members present:

PRODUCTIONS

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| Christmas, 1956. | St. Christopher's College, Blackheath. Christmas Mime with Carols. Producer: Miss Robins. |
| Easter, 1957. | Holy Trinity, Clapham. Christ in the Concrete City 31 visits. 4 performances. Producer: Miss Robins.
Southwark Cathedral Drama Group. The Way of the Cross. Produced in the Retro-choir. 4 performances. Producer: Miss Nicholl. |
| November, 1957. | Southwark Cathedral Drama Group. Short play written by one of group for demonstration at A.G.M.
Second play for A.G.M., Road to Damascus by Margaret Wood. Cast drawn from London members and friends. Both these plays produced by Miss Nicholl. |
| The Future. | Southwark Cathedral Group. Demonstration of term's work before Christmas. Hope for production of The Sinner in Spring Term. Producer: Miss Nicholl. |

May. Southgate Council of Christian Churches. Large-scale production of **The Comedian** by Ghéon. Producer: Miss Nicholl.

SUMMER SCHOOLS

August, 1957. University College, Keele, Staffordshire. Nine-day course. 144 students. One of the tutors, Mr. John Crockett, wrote a modern Passion Play as an exercise for the whole school. A valuable experiment.

11th to 20th August, 1958. Next year's course will be at St. Luke's College, Exeter. Theme, "From Playwright's Idea to Curtain Up."

SHORT COURSES

Last winter. British and Foreign Bible Society, London Youth Group. Four Saturday Sessions on Religious Drama. Tutors: both Travelling Advisers, and Mr. and Mrs. Linnell.

February. Week-end Mill Hill, based on John Keble Church. 60 students. Very good school. Tutors: both Travelling Advisers.

March. Clitheroe, Lancs. Week-end. Tutor: Miss Robins.
May. Cinderford, Glos. Week-end. Tutor: Miss Robins. Putney. Week-end. Tutors: Miss Nicholl, Mr. Hogben and Mrs. Linnell.

September. Hornchurch, London. Week-end. Miss Nicholl and Mr. Hogben. Belfast. Week-end. Tutor: Miss Nicholl. Brighton. Week-end. Arranged by Sussex Branch. Tutors: Miss Nicholl and Miss Lambourne.

October. Durham County Week-end. At Lambton Castle. Tutors: Miss Nicholl and Miss Keily. Cardiff. Week-end. Arranged by South Wales Branch. Tutors: Mr. David Giles and Mr. Hogben.

Future. Manchester-Sheffield Week-end in Derbyshire.
December. Central London Week-end.
January. And other short courses later on.

MEETINGS, ETC.

February. Members' Meeting for Putney area. Miss Nicholl.
March. Members' Meeting for Central London area. Miss Nicholl
May. Bristol Campaign. Many meetings. Miss Robins. Salisbury-R.D. Fellowship. A.G.M. Miss Nicholl. Wimbledon Ruridecanal Conference. Miss Robins.
Talks by Miss Robins at Cheltenham, Malvern, etc.
Talks by Miss Nicholl at Lingfield, Brompton, Brighton, Welling, Hornchurch, Y.M.C.A. London, West Ealing.
Talk by Miss F. Collins at Merton Park. Talk by Mr. H. Bennett to Y.P.F., Bloomsbury Baptist Church.
Plays seen by Miss Nicholl at Chelsea, St. Pancras, Earls Court, City, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, Hendon, Catford.
Plays seen by Miss Robins at Hendon, Mill Hill, Chelsea, St. Pancras, Southwark, Brompton, Woodbury Down.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Miss Robins. Adjudication of G.F.S. Festival of Drama. London Finals Standing Conference of Drama Associations. Three-day Conference. National Union Townswomen's Guilds Drama Conference. Executive member London Diocesan Council Voluntary Religious Education. Discussions concerning four-year mission in Blackburn Diocese, and part of drama in this Mission. Romsey Abbey Players, rehearsal of missionary play.
- Miss Nicholl. Organisation of performance of **The Way of the Cross** in Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, for benefit of our members.

5. Miss Nicholl's Report: Miss Nicholl mentioned three things which would be of interest to the meeting:

(1) As an experiment, 600 members had been notified about a London production of **The Way of the Cross**. The Holy Trinity Brompton Players had put on an extra performance on a Saturday especially for R.D.S. members. Far more replies to circulars had been received than could be accommodated and people had had to be turned away. It was a good production and impressive.

(2) In the summer Miss Bainbridge Bell and Miss Nicholl went to Cerne Abbas to see their Epiphany play, produced by Brother Peter. A small barn was used for a theatre with a small stage erected at one end, and the play was done in mime.

(3) The Society is putting on its first week-end school in London from 31st January to 1st February, 1958. Miss Nicholl asked members to help publicise this course as it is the first to be held in Central London.

6. Librarian's Report: An encouraging increase was reported in the number of packets of books sent out during the year; the total was 1,184 packets, of which 275 were sets. 64 new plays had been added to stock including 14 typescripts, and 20 titles have been added to the reference section.

The library is now comfortably installed in the Shaftesbury Avenue offices and a large number of members have paid visits to look round the shelves or to discuss problems. A heavy post arrives daily from all parts of Great Britain and often from overseas, each letter being answered either by a parcel of books or by a letter in return. From the overseas post it would appear that missionary workers are taking a great interest in the possibilities of Religious Drama, and information is being collected on the special needs and talents of the different areas. Letters have come recently from such addresses as Montevideo, Hobart, Hong Kong, and the British Virgin Islands. The Society's first responsibility, however, as a National Society, is to Great Britain, and the bulk of the library's work deals with requests of all kinds from this country.

Bookstalls were provided for fourteen week-end schools and conferences during the year. When these took place in a town where there was an S.P.C.K. bookshop we enjoyed their co-operation, and in general the Society's links with S.P.C.K. remain strong. The bookstall at Keele Summer School was particularly successful. An attractive room was assigned to it and display space found for posters and photographs.

The librarian reported the pamphlet of "Plays for Christmas and Epiphany" had sold out so quickly the Society had been able to print a revised edition at the end of August. The question of catalogues was a difficult one. To be really useful a catalogue *must* be up-to-date. Card and sheaf catalogues were not practical for the Society's purpose—a printed list was the only possibility and such lists are liable to be cumbersome and difficult to revise often enough. Therefore the library's plan at present was not to issue another general catalogue but to print a series of subject lists which can be revised at frequent

intervals, and which put together will cover the whole field of Religious Drama. Christmas and Passiontide plays are already dealt with and other steps in preparation.

The year had been a busy and interesting one and hopeful indications were reported for the future.

Public Relations Officer's Report: Mr. Brookes reported on steps being taken to increase the Society's income and also to publicise its activities. A campaign had been launched to bring in 5,000 members by 1961. Every member had been asked to obtain one new member this year, another by the end of 1959, and a third by 1961, 1961 being the last year in which the Society derives any benefit from the Rockefeller Grant. It is not asking too much of members to help in this all-important campaign for membership. This is a missionary society, therefore in a sense every member is a missionary. The Council had agreed to give to the member who obtained most new members by 1st June, 1958, a free nomination to the Summer School. Since August the Society had obtained 55 new members. Contacts were being made with various Trusts and Funds whose objects might justify their helping the Society. Contacts were also being made with branches of Industry and schemes put into operation which may result in the formation of a small company.

Regarding publicity, new literature was being prepared for the Society and was hoped this would be available shortly. Any suggestions from members regarding literature would be welcomed as it must be attractive and eye-catching.

Mr. Brookes also said Diocesan visits were being made as a result of the memorandum prepared for the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Elections: The election of the Council was then held, there being 27 nominations for 20 places. The Rev. P. Turner, Mr. J. Barton and Mr. A. L. Brookes were appointed tellers. Those elected were:

Ronald Ayres, Esq., Mrs. K. M. Baxter, Miss F. Collins, Rev. A. E. Cordell, Miss C. Deverill, Rev. P. Bullock Flint, Rev. F. Glendenning, Rev. Canon G. Hewitt, Rev. Dr. Alan Kay, Miss Pamela Keily, Miss S. M. Pearce, Harold Bennett, Esq., Raymond Chapman, Esq., Very Rev. Dean of Chichester, John Dalby, Esq., Miss Joan Ford, Rev. C. V. Sproxtton, Graham Suter, Esq., Miss Henzie Raeburn, Rev. R. Duce.

As there was only one nomination in each case the following were declared elected:

Chairman of the Society, E. Martin Browne, Esq.; Hon. Treasurer, J. H. L. Trustram, Esq.; Auditors, Davies, Watson & Co.

Consideration of Society's Accounts: Members present were given copies of the accounts for the year ending 30th June, 1957. The Treasurer drew attention to the excess of expenditure over income for the year, which was £370 as compared with £596 for the previous year, and then went on to discuss various items in the accounts and to answer questions from members. Mr. Trustram emphasized that the Rockefeller Fund Grant had been given for a definite purpose and the money must be used to enable the Society to become self-supporting. That is why the Council decided one of the most important things had been to engage a man for appeals and public relations. The Treasurer expressed the Society's gratitude to S.P.C.K. for their generous grant and for all Mr. Bishop had done for the Society in past years. Proposed Mrs. Hunter, seconded Mrs. Owen: That these Accounts be received and adopted.

Carried unanimously.

The meeting then adjourned for lunch.

After lunch members saw performances of **Snow in the Street** and excerpt from **The Road to Damascus** by Margaret Wood.

On resumption of the meeting Mrs. Baxter expressed the appreciation and thanks of the members to Miss Ursula Nicholl and the Southwark Group and other players for the plays they had just presented.

10. Report of Branch Activities: Summaries of the reports were given to members. In opening the discussion, Miss Robins expressed concern over the Bradford Branch. One of the R.D.S. staff would be going to the North to see how they could help put the Branch on its feet again. It was with great pleasure the meeting learnt of the formation of the Bristol/Gloucestershire Somerset Branch.

Referring to Hampshire, Miss Robins said Miss Cicely Deverill of Southampton had been appointed our representative on the Hampshire Drama Council. Aided by the Rev. Dr. Machin of Andover they were developing the idea of area representatives in Hampshire who could build up the membership of the Society. This was an idea which could be copied by other areas.

Discussion on Branch Activities: In discussion which came from all parts of the hall points made were:

(a) Had the Society been publicised in various parts of the country, such as Blackburn and Bradford, and had Youth Groups been contacted in that part of the country? This was considered a good idea, and names and addresses of interested people were asked for in order that literature could be sent to them.

(b) Had articles been published in Parish and Diocesan magazines? It was stated the Society did this whenever possible.

(c) It was suggested the Society should always be approached for information, which they were always willing to supply, and that the Society's literature might be displayed in Public Libraries. It was stated this had been tried several years ago but might be tried again.

(d) The Society was asked to ensure that the word "Inter-denominational" appeared in all publicity for schools and courses, otherwise people were not willing to support it.

(e) The question was brought up of *Christian Drama* supplied to Groups. It was considered that half the members did not see the magazine. One suggestion was that a list of members be placed on the back of the magazine each member crossing off his or her name when read.

(f) The question was asked as to how headquarters could serve the region better, and Branch representatives urged to tell the meeting why new members could not be obtained.

(g) The question of the difficulty of casting a play was mentioned. One suggestion was that an advertisement be put in the local paper of the area concerned and a public audition held. It was stated that the Southgate Council of Churches were putting on **The Comedian**, and public audition for casting had been held. Alternatively the opinion was expressed that the only fruitful method was a personal appeal to individuals.

(h) The enquiry was made as to how many members had been lost during the year. The following information was given: 46 individuals 43 Groups 33 individuals lapsed and 32 Groups.

(i) The Society was asked whether photographs could be used in *Christian Drama*. It was reported these were being included in the next issue.

(j) It was suggested that *Christian Drama* publicise plays about to be performed in order that members would be enabled to see them. In reply the opinion was expressed that *Christian Drama* came out too infrequently for this to be feasible.

This concluded the business, and the Rev. R. Tydeman proposed a vote of thanks to Mrs. Baxter as Chairman.

The meeting adjourned at 4.10 p.m.